

Urges Senate to Act Immediately Before August Recess

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell today wrote to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid urging him to bring H.R. 5822, the Fiscal Year 2011 Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill, which includes \$20 million in funding for veteran suicide prevention outreach, to the Senate floor before going on recess.

"The suicide epidemic is nothing short of an emergency and I believe this bill should be given nothing less than emergency consideration," said Mitchell, who serves as Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. "The Senate should not put this issue on hold while Senators go home for a month. Given the overwhelming bipartisan support this bill received in the House, I would hope it could achieve swift Senate approval."

On Wednesday, H.R. 5822 passed the House of Representatives this week with an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 411-6 and is awaiting Senate action.

In June, the Army experienced a record high number of suicides. USA Today reported that "the suicide rate among 18-to-29-year old men who've left the military has gone up significantly."

Specifically, according to The New York Times, veterans account for about one in five of the more than 30,000 suicides committed in the United States each year. [Source: [USA Today](#), Jan. 11, 2010;

[New York Times](#)

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July 30, 2010]

Yesterday, the Army released a 15-month-long study that reported that in Fiscal Year 2009, 239 soldiers committed suicide in both the active duty and reserve force. Additionally, 146 soldiers died due to "high risk" behavior, including 74 drug overdoses. During the same time frame there were 1,713 suicide attempts. [Source: [CNN](#), July 29, 2010]

Mitchell has repeatedly called upon the VA to increase outreach to veterans who need mental

health services and are at risk of suicide. Out of an estimated veteran population of 23 million veterans, only about 8 million veterans are enrolled for care through the VA [Source: [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), April 28, 2010]

As of April 2010, the VA has reported nearly 7,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans, which were attributed to seeing the ads, public service announcements (PSAs), or promotional products. Additionally, referrals to VA mental health services increased. In Phoenix, the VA reported a 234 percent increase in calls to the suicide hotline within 30 days of the launch of its public awareness campaign. However, late last year, the VA told Mitchell that, despite the success, the PSAs had stopped airing. [Source: [Congressional Inquiry](#), March 2010] Mitchell has continued to call on VA to explain why the VA has stopped airing a successful public service announcement at a recent subcommittee hearing. [Source: [Mitchell Release](#), July 14, 2010]

Video of the VA's PSA featuring Forrest Gump star Gary Sinise promoting the suicide hotline can be found [here](#).

Since 2007, Congressman Mitchell and the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations which he chairs, has been examining the epidemic of suicide rates among Veterans, and the VA's efforts to reach out to veterans at risk. [Sources: [Mitchell Release](#), November 19, 2007; For additional information about the epidemic of veteran suicides: [CBS News](#), November 13, 2007]

Until 2008, the VA had a self-imposed ban on TV advertising as a means to conduct outreach to veterans - including outreach to those at risk for suicide. Mitchell began calling upon the VA to reverse its long-standing self-imposed ban on television advertising and increase outreach to veterans who need mental health services and are at risk of suicide. In 2008, the VA reversed the ban, and launched a pilot public awareness campaign in Washington, DC to inform veterans and their families about where they can turn for help - which was ultimately expanded nationally. [Source: [CBS News](#), July 14, 2008; [Mitchell Release](#), June 18, 2008]

Below is the text of Mitchell's letter to Majority Leader Reid.

July 30, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid

Majority Leader

United States Senate

U.S. Capitol Building

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid,

I write to respectfully urge the Senate to pass H.R. 5822, the Fiscal Year 2011 Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill, which includes \$20 million in funding for suicide outreach prevention, and to do so before the Senate leaves town for the August recess.

This bill passed the House of Representatives this week with an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 411-6 and is awaiting Senate action.

The suicide epidemic is nothing short of an emergency, and I believe this bill should be given nothing less than emergency consideration.

Each day, an estimated 18 veterans commit suicide, and each day the Senate fails to act on this bill delays much needed additional outreach and prevention to help veterans at risk for suicide.

The gravity and urgency of this problem cannot be overstated. Just yesterday, the Army released a 15-month-long study found in fiscal year 2009, 239 soldiers committed suicide in both the active duty and reserve force. In addition, 146 soldiers died due to "high risk" behavior, including 74 drug overdoses. During the same time frame there were 1,713 suicide attempts." [See: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/07/29/army.suicides/>].

As you know, the Army experienced a high number of 32 suicides in June. USA Today reported, "the suicide rate among 18-to29-year old men who've left the military has gone up significantly." Specifically, "the rate for these veterans went up 26% from 2005 to 2007." [See: http://www.usatoday.com/news/military/2010-01-11-veterans-suicide_N.htm]

I have chaired numerous hearings examining the VA's suicide prevention and outreach efforts, most recently on July 14, 2010. According to the VA, preliminary analysis of its initial, nationwide public awareness campaign met with significant success. The campaign, which included a Public Service Announcement featuring Forrest Gump star Gary Sinise, let veterans and their families know about the suicide hotline. The VA has reported nearly 7,000 rescues of actively suicidal veterans which were attributed to seeing the ads, public service announcements, or promotional products. In the Phoenix metropolitan area alone, the VA reported a 234 percent increase in calls within the first 30 days of its public awareness campaign.

I do not believe the Senate should put this issue on hold while Senators go home for a month. Given the overwhelming bipartisan support this bill received in the House, I would hope it could achieve swift Senate approval.

I respectfully urge the Senate act on this legislation as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Harry E. Mitchell

Member of Congress

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